



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES
Bureau for Public Health

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TO: West Virginia Superintendents and School Officials

FROM: Lauren Spadafora, PhD
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RE: Influenza Outbreaks in Schools, 2019–20 Season

The 2018–19 influenza season was moderately severe and the longest seen in 10 years. There were 143 influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported nationwide. Although no such deaths were reported in West Virginia, a third of influenza and influenza-like illness (ILI) outbreaks reported to the State were in school settings. To prevent and control influenza illnesses among students and their families, West Virginia school systems should prepare for upcoming influenza activity and have plans for influenza outbreak management in place.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have guidance for school administrators available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm>. CDC recommends schools to do the following:

1. Encourage students, parents, and staff to get a yearly flu vaccine.
2. Encourage students, parents, and staff to take everyday preventive actions (e.g. stay home when sick, use proper respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene, and conduct routine surface cleaning) to stop the spread of germs.
3. Educate students, parents, and staff on what to do if someone gets sick.
4. Establish relationships with state and local public health officials for ongoing communication.

For the 2019–2020 season, the West Virginia Office of Prevention and Epidemiology Services maintains these previous recommendations for schools:

1. Track absenteeism daily and determine what percent absenteeism is above normal levels. Use a call-down tool to identify reasons for any increases in absenteeism. A call-down tool and other useful materials can be found in our influenza outbreak toolkit (www.oeps.wv.gov/toolkits/Pages/toolkits_flu.aspx).
2. Report outbreaks of influenza or influenza-like illness (ILI) immediately to the school's local health department. Visit www.dhhr.wv.gov/localhealth/pages/map.aspx to find contact information for local health departments.
3. Maintain routine general cleaning procedures during influenza outbreaks. Additional disinfection is not recommended to kill influenza viruses.
4. Do not close schools for influenza outbreaks unless there is not sufficient staff to instruct

students or maintain a safe and healthy environment.

5. If unable to maintain a healthy and safe school environment, make a collective decision regarding school closure through close communication with state and local school and health officials.

For questions or concerns, please contact your local health department or the Bureau for Public Health, Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at (304) 558-5358, extension 1.